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ABSTRACT

A senior English course at Padua Academy (Delaware) is going to be taught through an interdisciplinary approach that involves as many faculty members as possible, stresses the teaching of the writing process, and reinforces the concept that writing is not just for the English class. Speaker presentations by members of other departments will be followed by writing assignments that will allow the students to choose topics in areas of interest to them and will also provide an opportunity for them to enrich their background in many areas, thus encouraging a wide range of literacy. Writing will be taught as process, with the prewriting stage, the need to find the best mode for structuring writing, and directive comments in response to student writing (peer review, teacher conferences, multiple drafts, and self-evaluation) being particularly stressed. As a work in progress, the course still may need to be modified after its implementation. Utilizing the services of a consultant from Beaver College, cooperating with a local college, and restructuring the interdisciplinary approach for freshman classes are other possibilities. (JL)

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MODERN BRITISH and AMERICAN LITERATURE:
A View Through Writing and the Disciplines

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Writing in the Humanities

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MODERN BRITISH and AMERICAN LITERATURE:
A View Through Writing and the Disciplines

Padua Academy is a Catholic girls' high school located in Wilmington, Delaware. Although the school is owned and operated by Saint Anthony of Padua Parish as a Parish-Diocesan high school, students are drawn from fifty-five parishes within the City of Wilmington, the surrounding suburbs, southeastern Pennsylvania, and northern Maryland. At the present time, Padua has a student enrollment of approximately seven hundred, forty girls. I.Q. records indicate that the ability levels of these students range as follows:

80% ----- Average ability
10% ----- Above average ability
10% ----- Below average ability

One problem which appears to frustrate teachers at Padua, regardless of discipline and regardless of student ability, is a somewhat perennial problem, that is, the quality, or lack of quality, of student writing. As a teacher of English, I am frequently frustrated both by the complaints of teachers in other disciplines as well as by my own inadequacy in getting students to produce quality writing.

The opening weeks of this Institute directed my search for a solution to this problem in a very definitive direction. The solution lay somewhere within my own methods of teaching. I rather quickly ascertained that:

1. I had, for the most part, expected students to know how to write.

In assigning students a topic, I somehow expected them automati-

cally to produce a well-written final product. I discovered, to the contrary, that writing is a process to be taught, a process which provides students both with purpose and with direction.

2. My comments and responses to student writing were "after the fact." For the most part, students had little opportunity to act on the advice which I gave. In addition, I learned that my comments lacked clarity and direction.
3. While I had frequently asserted that "Writing is not just for English Class," I had failed to provide students with concrete evidence to support that claim.

I began to ask, "Where do I go from here?" How can I adequately incorporate these methods of teaching composition into our already-existing program, or at least, into my own sphere of that program. My teaching assignment for the coming year consists tentatively of two senior English classes, one regular freshman English class, one individualized freshman English class, and part-time assistance with scheduling and curriculum. I have decided that my immediate project will focus on the senior English program and possibly later extend into the two freshman courses.

Senior students at Padua Academy, as part of the school's sequential literature program, study Modern British and American literature. This project involves the intent to teach this already-existing course through an interdisciplinary approach, involving as many faculty members as possible, stressing the teaching of the writing process, and reinforcing the concept that "Writing is not just for English."

How will this project be concretized? What specific attempts will be made to convert the approach I have previously employed into an interdisciplinary approach? What efforts will be made to teach writing as a process?

One concrete step in altering my approach to the prescribed literature course will be to invite faculty members from various disciplines into my classroom to speak on topics related to the established literature curriculum, but as viewed from the stance of their respective disciplines and/or to speak on the appropriate methods and conventions of writing within these other disciplines. This is a definite change from the approach I have previously used. In other years, I have spent the first half of the year on Modern British Literature, presenting literary selections from the Victorian Period and from the 20th Century strictly from a chronological stance, within the context of literary history. During the second semester, I have focused on selections from Modern American Literature: The Great Gatsby, The Grapes of Wrath, A Raisin in the Sun, and selected poems and short stories. Also during the second semester, students have written term papers. Through these term papers, I have attempted to teach students some concept of research procedures, requiring that each student submit, in various stages, a topic, a thesis statement, a tentative bibliography, a tentative outline, notecards, a rough draft, and a final draft. In both semesters, other written assignments have consisted chiefly of essays analyzing various aspects of the literature selections or of some type of "creative" writing.

I feel that my new plan to incorporate an interdisciplinary aspect to this course will have several valuable ramifications. One indirect outcome

may be to encourage teachers in other disciplines to stress the importance of writing skills within their own classes and to articulate for themselves and for their students what it is that constitutes good writing within their respective disciplines. I feel that this result can be achieved indirectly and in a nonthreatening manner. I will be inviting these teachers to come into my classroom to assist me in improving my teaching methods. However, the fact that I am encouraging students to write on topics outside the scope of literature may spark a bit of reciprocity!

Second, I feel that such an approach will provide the students with a clearer insight into the literature program; namely, that the literature which they study does not exist in a vacuum, nor is it simply an entity among other isolated entities listed on student rosters. Rather, it is my hope that these students will come to view literature as an integral part of a people, a culture, and the historical background from which both the people and the culture have emerged.

Third, because each of these faculty presentations will involve a follow-up written assignment, the students will receive concrete application of the fact that "Writing is not just for English," but is rather a means of learning and a uniquely valuable tool for communicating learned material within all disciplines. Most of these written assignments will involve research on the part of the student, and it is herein that I propose to teach research techniques. Rather than the previously required long term paper, students will learn and incorporate research procedures into a series of shorter papers.

Several possibilities seem feasible as topics for "guest speakers" from among faculty members. These topics will require consultation with the departments involved before plans can be finalized. Other topic choices may come from the faculty members themselves. Tentative topics include:

1. Science Department -- The Effect of Charles Darwin's Origin of Species and Charles Lyell's Principles of Geology on Established Victorian Traditions.
--used in conjunction with Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach"
2. Theology Department
 - a. Cardinal Newman: Oxford Movement to Catholicism
--used in conjunction with Newman's poetry
 - b. The Variety of Prose and Poetic Styles in the Old and New Testaments
--used in conjunction with a study of James Weldon Johnson's poetry from God's Trombones
3. Social Studies Department
 - a. The Culture of Malaysia (or similar cultures)
--used in conjunction with Conrad's story, "The Lagoon"
 - b. America in the 1920's
--used in conjunction with The Great Gatsby
 - c. The Effects of the Depression and the Dust Bowl on Migrants
--used in conjunction with The Grapes of Wrath
 - d. What Constitutes a Case Study? (Sociology teacher)
--used for a paper on one of the characters of The Grapes of Wrath or A Raisin in the Sun
4. Music Department -- The Elements of Folk Music (focusing on themes of war and alienation and on the music of Guthrie, Dylan, Joan Baez, Paul Simon, Art Garfunkel, Buffy Sainte Marie, John Lennon, Paul McCartney, and Pete Seeger)
--used in connection with the following poems:
"Dreamers" (Sassoon), "The Man He Killed" (Hardy), "Dulce et Decorum Est" (Owen), "The Soldier" (Brooke), "An Irish Airman Foresees His Death" (Yeats), "The Horses" (Muir), "Ballard" (Auden), "Naming of Parts" (Reed), "Musee de Beux Arts" (Auden), "Richard Cory" (Robinson)

5. Art Department -- What constitutes realism in art? Is some art classified as naturalistic?
--Students will be asked to compare and contrast these tendencies in art with the concepts of realism and naturalism in English
6. Business Department -- The Importance of Good Writing in the Business World; The Value of A Liberal Education in the Business World
7. Library -- Use of Reference Tools

In addition to written assignments as follow-ups of speaker presentations, I plan to provide students with options in some written assignments that will allow the students to choose topics in areas that may be of interest to them. For example, students might submit reports based on articles from scientific magazines. Another such assignment might involve descriptions of and research on the art work found in the literature book. I find the suggestions in Writing in the Arts and Sciences particularly helpful as springboards for structuring assignments of this type.¹ Such assignments not only offer students a chance to fulfill a personal interest, but also provide an opportunity to enrich their background in many areas, thus encouraging a wider range of literacy. I feel such opportunities are what Barry Beyer is advocating when he states: "Mastery of the processes of reading and writing seems absolutely essential for student success today. One cannot learn information, inquire about values, engage in intelligent social action, learn about one's ethnic roots, or even succeed in school or in the working world without first being literate--and that means being able to read with comprehension and to write."² In this same text, Back to Basics in Social Studies, Beyer also quotes University of California professor, Josephine Miles. In an unpublished paper entitled

"What We Compose," Professor Miles comments on the relationship between writing and writing in context when she asserts "... composition does not work in a vacuum; it cannot be learned 'once and for all'. It works rather in a medium (content area) which grows increasingly complex as we learn more about it and requires further and further adaptation of the powers to compose."³ It is this interdependence between writing skills and writing content that I wish to emphasize through this revised approach to my literature course.

Because writing is such an integral part of this project, it is imperative to emphasize the teaching of writing as a process. It is through the teaching of this process that inexperienced writers learn the necessity, and hopefully the means, of transforming their writing from what Linda Flower and John Hayes term "writer-based prose" into "reader-based prose."⁴ Such a transformation stems from the writer's awareness of his audience and of his purpose in relation to that audience. Perhaps one of the most basic and practical insights that I have derived from this Institute is an increased awareness of my responsibility as a teacher in making the inexperienced writer aware of his purpose and his audience through clear-cut and focused writing assignments.

The first step in the writing process that I plan to stress to a greater degree than I have previously is the pre-writing stage, a directed method of helping students to generate ideas. While I find a great deal of merit in and possible use of all of the heuristic models presented during the Institute, the devices presented by Flower and Hayes in their article, "Problem-Solving Strategies and the Writing Process," provide what I consider the most

applicable devices for the students whom I teach. For example, following Flower's and Hayes' explanation of the need for determining both a goal and viable operators for achieving that goal, they suggest a series of techniques to generate ideas by propelling students into actual writing situations. Of these techniques, I envision the following as being most suitable for my purposes: brainstorming, staging a scenario, developing analogies, nutshelling, and treeing ideas.⁵

Another aspect of the writing process that I plan to stress with my students is the need to find the best mode of structuring their writing in order to achieve their purpose. In this regard, I find the method of analysis of discourse proposed by James Kinneavy one that I can profitably adapt, if in a somewhat simplistic manner, to my students' needs. Kinneavy's explanation of the overlapping properties of the modes (narration, classification, description, and evaluation) and the aims (expository, persuasive, literary, and expressive) of discourse seems to offer a viable base from which to launch students into the use of concrete writing structures.⁶ Use of sample student writings which employ these modes and aims will provide students with means of analyzing and refining both the model's and their own writing.

Still another extremely important insight that I have gained from this Institute comes from the articles⁷ and the lecture by Nancy Sommers on teacher response to student writing. Within her remarks lies the entire core, the nucleus, not only of the means of improving student writing, but more importantly, of enabling students to discover the means of improving their own writing ability. In fact, I find in Doctor Sommers' theory the rationale

and binding force for many of the techniques and approaches described at the Institute. To me, the concept of peer review, teacher conference, multiple drafts, and self-evaluation all in some measure emanate from and flow back to Nancy Sommers' concept of the necessity of directive comments in response to student writing.

The fact that this project is a work in progress indicates that there are things to come, avenues to be explored. I see this exploration encompassing several areas.

1. Actual implementation of the project already stated will provide realistic input for refining and defining future plans. Some things will work; some will work with modification. Others possibly will not work at all. However, as the project approaches realization, I foresee the students involved beginning to view writing both as a means of communication and as a means of learning, becoming more experienced in executing the writing process, developing a better understanding of research procedures, learning to employ these research and writing skills in all disciplines, and developing a more integrated view of literature within the total context of the educational program.
2. In addition to informing the faculty of my plans and eliciting their help, I plan to suggest to our principal that we utilize the services of a consultant from Beaver College for a faculty in-service day to discuss the concept of writing across the curriculum.

3. In an attempt to develop more collaboration between the high school and college levels, Sister Bernadette McInnis, Claudia Smorada, and I are planning a visit to Neumann College for my seniors. Details are not yet defined but tentatively include a "College for a Day" academic experience.
4. During the course of the coming school year, I would like to "play" with the question of how to incorporate this interdisciplinary approach into my two freshman classes. Since these two classes differ in content and structure and are comprised of two different ability levels, I will need to construct two different approaches.

I find clear support of this entire proposal within the philosophy of Padua Academy. This philosophy at one point states that "Education must be aimed at the development of the whole person," and again, "The Catholic concept of education situates man within the total society in which he lives and develops." At the same time, one of the general policies of Padua Academy states that "Teachers are welcome to use whatever teaching techniques they find suitable to their own personality and their subject matter, and which involve the student ever more deeply in the learning process." Inherent within this policy is the implication that varied modes function to stimulate and to effect the learning process. Janet Emig singles out writing as one such mode. She states: "Writing represents a unique mode of learning -- not merely valuable, not merely special, but unique . . . Writing serves learning uniquely because writing as process-and-product possesses a cluster of attributes that correspond uniquely to certain powerful learning

strategies."⁸ In addition to the anticipated goal of improving the quality of student writing, I feel that implementation of my proposal will enable me to make more practical application of the school's general philosophy and to take greater advantage of the options already available to me within the school's policies.

FOOTNOTES

¹Elaine Maimon, et al, Writing in the Arts and Sciences (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Winthrop Publishers, Inc., 1981).

²Barry Beyer, Back-to-Basics in Social Studies (Boulder, Colorado: Social Science Education Consortium, Inc., 1977), pp. 11-12.

³Josephine Miles, "What We Compose," as cited by Barry Beyer in Back-to-Basics in Social Studies, p. 18.

⁴Linda Flower and John Hayes, "Problem Solving Strategies and the Writing Process," College English, 39 (December 1977), 459-60.

⁵Ibid., pp. 453-57.

⁶James L. Kinneavy, A Theory of Discourse (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1971), Chapters 1-2.

⁷Nancy Sommers, "Revision Strategies of Student Writing and Experienced Adult Writers," College Composition and Communications, 31 (December 1980, 378-88; "Responding to Student Writing" College Composition and Communications, 33 (May 1982), 148-156.

⁸Janet Emig, "Writing As a Mode of Learning," College Composition and Communication, 28 (May 1977), 122.

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APPENDIX

Modern British Literature

The following selections are as they appear in the Table of Contents of Adventures in English Literature, for the Victorian Period and for the 20th Century. From these selections I will make choices pertinent to the newly formulated interdisciplinary approach. Senior Students will also study Hamlet.

VICTORIAN POETRY

Alfred, Lord Tennyson

The Lady of Shalott

Ulysses

Break, Break, Break

The Eagle

from *The Princess*

Tears, Idle Tears

Now Sleeps the Crimson Petal
from *In Memoriam*

Crossing the Bar

Robert Browning

My Last Duchess

Home Thoughts, from Abroad

Love Among the Ruins

Prospice

Matthew Arnold

In Harmony with Nature

To Marguerite—Continued

Dover Beach

Thomas Hardy

The Darkling Thrush

The Man He Killed

Ah, Are You Digging on My Grave?
in Time of "The Breaking of Nations"

Gerard Manley Hopkins

Cod's Grandeur

The Windhover

Pied Beauty

Spring and Fall: To a Young Child

A. E. Housman

To an Athlete Dying Young

Is My Team Ploughing

When I Was One-and-Twenty

With Rue My Heart Is Laden

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

from *Sonnets from the Portuguese*

Sonnet 14

(If thou must love me, let it be for nought)

Sonnet 43

(How do I love thee? Let me count the
ways)

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

The Woodspurge

Silent Noon

Emily Brontë

Song

George Meredith

Lucifer in Starlight

Christina Rossetti

Sleeping at Last

Robert Louis Stevenson

Requiem

VICTORIAN PROSE

Charles Dickens

from *Hard Times*

Thomas Hardy

The Three Strangers

Rudyard Kipling

Miss Youghal's Sais

VICTORIAN DRAMA

Oscar Wilde

The Importance of Being Earnest

*The English Novel in the Nineteenth
Century*

The Growth of the English Language

The Twentieth Century

PROSE

Joseph Conrad
The Lagoon

Saki (Hector Hugh Munro)
The Schartz-Metterklume Method

E. M. Forster
Notes on the English Character

Virginia Woolf
The New Dress

James Joyce
Araby

D. H. Lawrence
The Rocking-Horse Winner

Katherine Mansfield
A Dill Pickle

Liam O'Flaherty
The Wild Goat's Kid

Elizabeth Bowen
Tears, Idle Tears

Frank O'Connor
Masculine Protest

George Orwell
Shooting an Elephant

Graham Greene
Across the Bridge

Doris Lessing
A Sunrise on the Veld

Nadine Gordimer
The Train from Rhodesia

POETRY

William Butler Yeats
When You Are Old
The Song of Wandering Aengus
The Wild Swans at Coole
An Irish Airman Foresees His Death
The Second Coming
Sailing to Byzantium

Walter de la Mare
All That's Past

D. H. Lawrence
Snake

Siegfried Sassoon
Ever, One Sang

Rupert Brooke
The Soldier

Edwin Muir
The Horses

Edith Sitwell
Sir Beelzebub

T. S. Eliot
Preludes
The Hollow Men

Wilfred Owen
Dulce et Decorum Est

Robert Graves
The Troll's Nosegay
She Tells Her Love While Half Asleep
Mermaid, Dragon, Fiend

W. H. Auden
Ballad
(O what is that sound which so thrills
the ear)
That Night When Joy Began
Musée des Beaux Arts

The Twentieth Century (Continued)

Louis MacNeice
The Sunlight on the Garden
The Wiper

Stephen Spender
The Express
What I Expected

Henry Reed
Naming of Parts

Dylan Thomas
The Force That Through the Green Fuse
Drives the Flower
Fern Hill
Do Not Go Gentle into That Good
Night

Philip Larkin
Going
Days
Coming

Thom Gunn
On the Move

Ted Hughes
View of a Pig
Hawk Roosting

DRAMA

Bernard Shaw
Preface to *Pygmalion*
Pygmalion
Epilogue

*The English Novel in the Twentieth
Century*

The Growth of the English Language

Guide to Literary Terms and Techniques
Glossary
Outline of Skills
List of Commentaries
Index of Titles by Themes
Index of Fine Art
Kings and Queens of England
General Index

Modern American Literature

The Great Gatsby

The Grapes of Wrath

A Raisin in the Sun

Selected Poems and Short Stories